

The Stone Monuments of the Khasi Hills. By C. B. CLARKE.
[Communicated by Professor H. Fowcett, through Sir John Lubbock, Bart].*

- [9] The Khasi Hills form a plateau, at a mean elevation of 4,500 feet above the sea, between the plain of Assam on the north and the plain of Sylhet on the south. They are inhabited by the Khasi tribe, a people very distinct from the Hindoos north and south of them, and who are a branch of a race which extends eastward as far as South China. Immediately east of them are the Jaintia people, also called Sintangs, who are very closely allied in race and customs to the Khasi tribe. The [10] Jaintia country is physically a portion of the same plateau as the Khasi, and is only artificially divided from it, and exhibits the same grassy hill-tops. The Khasi and Jaintia tribes together occupy the political district administered by the Deputy-Commissioner of Shillong, and the whole plateau is accordingly called the Shillong Plateau by Mr. Mallinett, the Dep. Superintendent of the Geological Survey in India. [11] Shillong is the English station which is the political capital. The plateau is remarkable for its freedom from the dense jungle which covers the neighbouring Himalayas at similar elevations; it is a fine rocky moss-like plateau, with isolated

* The woodcuts illustrating this paper have been kindly lent by Mr. Murray.

153 patches of open forest, and with scattered fir trees and oaks. Though south of the Himalaya range the character of the
157 country is more like that found in the Himalayas at 4,000 feet higher elevation, and many plants, never collected in the Himalayas below 2,000 feet above sea-level, are found in the Khasi Hills between 4,500—6,000 feet. In this marvellous plateau the sub-alpine and the sub-tropical forms overlap; at the very foot of elegant palms may be gathered the identical stag's horn moss, which, in Britain, is found only on mountains. On a fir tree much resembling a straggly Scotch fir is seen growing the *Vanda coccinea*, the king of epiphytic orchids; a gnarled oak will carry a gigantic tropical liana; the painted lady and many other British species of lepidoptera will be accompanied by gorgeous tropical papilio and by window moths eleven inches across the wing; the cuckoo and Himalayan pheasant are above, while the tiger, the wild elephant and the green python are below. Justly has Dr. Huxley observed, "I know no spot in the world more calculated to fascinate the naturalist who, while appreciating the elements of which a landscape is composed, is also keenly alive to the beauty and grandeur of tropical scenery."

211 2. Almost throughout Khasi-land, and in a less degree through the Jaintia country, monumental stones are common. They are numerous in villages in the valleys, but are especially prominent, and sometimes of gigantic size, scattered over the rounded hill-tops where they form a feature in the landscape. In all modern treatises of Archaeology and Anthropology the study of monumental stones forms an important chapter. Monuments of a remarkable similarity in design are found alike in Europe, Asia, and isolated islands in the Pacific Ocean, and these are in general of such extreme antiquity that they are treated as belonging to the prehistoric age. The Khasi stone monuments have attracted already much attention; not because of their great number and size; and, generally and chiefly, because on these hills the erection of these monuments is now in full practice. It is reasonably supposed that a careful study of the Khasi method of raising the stones, and of the traditions or customs in accordance with which they raise them, may throw some light upon more ancient monuments of the same kind, even upon Stonehenge. It has been proposed to send out a commission from England to survey these Khasi stone monuments. They are described by Dr. Huxley, in his work (*Mis. Journ.* II. 276), also by Colonel Faden in the *Collette River*, and some account has been lately given by Major G. W. Anderson in the "Journal of the Anthropological Institute," No. 2, Oct. 1871. The present memoir was written
[The article has been presented to the Society.—Analysis]

years ago, previous to some of these published accounts, but 211
contains several details not given by any of them.

3. The Khasi stones are of three classes, viz:—

a. The funeral pyres.

b. The kists containing the pots of ashes.

c. The monumental groups.

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It is the last class (c.) which has, hitherto, nearly monopolised attention, and to which the published notices almost exclusively refer.

4. THE FUNERAL PYRE.—When a rich man dies his body is generally reduced to ashes immediately, but his honorific cremation does not take place till some time, often a year, afterwards. In the interim the earthen jar containing his ashes is kept "under a stone" (in Khasi talk) (i.e., in a small temporary closed kist. For the honorific burning a pyre is prepared on which the ashes are burnt over again a very little, *pro forma*, and the great funeral feast follows.

The pyre is placed just outside the village of the deceased, on a hillside or in a clear space and near the road. The modern pyres are usually square (approximately), the sides of stone (dressed or undressed according to the means of the family) about four or five feet high, the whole of the middle filled with loose stones and earth up to the level of the walls.*

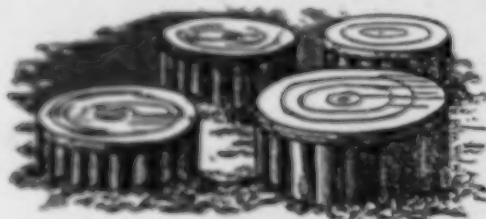
A pyre was raised about four years ago just outside the village of Marumai close by the English main road. Many hundreds of men and women carrying from $\frac{1}{2}$ cwt. to $1\frac{1}{2}$ cwt. on their backs pass close by this pyre daily and a considerable per centage rest a few minutes on it. Lodges are raised on two sides, but are by no means essential to a pyre; they merely add a utility. The Khasis mean the lodges to be a convenient height to rest on with a load, and each lodge satisfies this condition, but no Khasi would dream of measuring with a two-foot rule, so as to put them the same height. So the pyre itself is meant to be a square or thersahonta. All the Khasi stonework is done in this way; they do not care to make it geometrically accurate, and consequently in my opinion little valuable result could be drawn from any accurate measurement and mapping of the stone monuments.

This pyre at the entrance to Marumai is one of the most complete modern pyres. The ancient pyres were very seldom (if ever) made with hewn stones, and the Khasis state that in former times they were as often made round (i.e. oval) as square. Being thus originally very roughly shaped heaps of loose

* For admirable illustrations of the Khasi monuments, see "Proceedings of the Soc. Anti. Scotland," vol. i, p. 14. Ferguson's "Bute Stone Monuments," chap. viii, and "Aesthetic Recollections," vol. ccti, p. 200. [Ed.]

211 unhewn stones, and, being used on only one occasion, they
 764 rapidly fall into complete decay. Dr. Hooker mentions that
 he repeatedly remarked cones of earth, clay, and pebbles, about
 twelve feet high, upon the hills, which appeared to be artificial.
 These must have been the broken down pyrea.

764 5. THE KISTS CONTAINING THE POTS OF ASHES.—These consist of a circle or square of upright stones, fitting as closely as a Khasi can conveniently make them to do, with one round or square flat stone on the top. They vary in size from a few inches diameter to six or seven feet.



The circular kists are more especially used by the people of the valleys, i. e., who inhabit villages at less than 3,000 feet above the sea; at Walong and Sabhar, which stand west and east of the main Government road as it steeply ascends from Sylhet, there are hundreds (I am not sure that there are not thousands) of kists of this type inside the village. The Khasis of the grassy plateau, the true Nongphlang (i. e., people of the grass in Khasi language, the genuine representative type of the tribe) very commonly employ square kists.



One great feature of the Khasi sepulture is that the ashes of the families are collected from time to time. At first the ashes of a man are probably kept in a small kist. Then after a few years a great general family ceremony is held, and the ashes of the various individuals of the family are collected from the smaller kists. The ashes of all the men are collected into one earthen jar, the ashes of all the women are collected into another, and these two jars are placed in one larger kist, the jar

of women's ashes next the door, i. e., the last stone door; 744 the reason of which is that in Khasi-land the woman is always mistress of the house. The quantity of ashes altogether is very small.

Each occasion of collection of family ashes is accompanied by a grand family feast, which is mainly of pig. No bones of pig could by any chance get inside the kist; that would be barren.

The stones forming the kist fit as closely as a Khasi can conveniently make them; a mouse might, however, generally get in. In the neck of each earthen jar of ashes a close-fitting stone is placed so that no animal could get at the ashes within; but this, of course, does not fit by any means air-tight, and the damp of the climate affects the ashes so much that on re-opening the kists after even a few years, for the purpose of agglomerating the family ashes, it frequently happens that no trace of ashes is found in the earthen jar.

In the descriptions of the Khasi stone monuments hitherto published, these numerous kists appear often overlooked or confounded with the horizontal monumental slab. The kists differ entirely in their object and meaning, and in being closed. So long as they contain earthen jars they cannot be mistaken; but by the continual collection of family ashes the majority of the square kists are left with one side broken down and empty, and in such a state it is sometimes impossible to determine whether the horizontal slab be a monument or the lid of an old kist, unless a family can be found to claim it as their monument. Where there are no upright monumental stones near I incline to suppose that a large majority of these doubtful remains are kists and not monuments.

6. THE MONUMENTAL GROUP. — There are two general types 211 of monumental stones, viz., the upright slab and the horizontal slab.



The upright slabs are commonly grouped in threes or fives (sometimes they are seven or more); they are nearly always oblong and set up in a row with the tallest stone in the

211 middle; centered is a representation of a common type containing five stones.

A common height for the middle stone of such a monument will be six to ten feet, by 2-3 feet wide. The stones are much cut very deep, say 1-2 feet, into the earth; great numbers of fallen stones are seen. Monuments of this character are often placed on the crest of the hills, and in many parts of Khazland the landscape appears dotted over with them.

The horizontal slabs are commonly grouped in pairs. The flat slabs may be 1-15 feet long, and are rarely or scarcely quadrangular, and they generally have some of the corners irregularly rounded off, and then pass into the oval or round horizontal slab, which is also a frequent type.

The upright and horizontal slabs are often combined to form a single monument, and perhaps the monument of all the combinations is that in which two upright slabs have two horizontal before them. The combinations adopted are, however, endless in variety. In these combinations it must be understood that the whole group of stones forms one indivisible monument, which may be the monument of one individual, a household, or a family. Families retain a history of the monuments which belong to the family, and thus to a small degree of the names of their ancestors. Such family monuments may be repaired, added to, or rebuilt from time to time. They are not necessarily placed where the family names are kept in books, or near such books; but they are usually at no great distance from the village where the family dwells.

The putting up a large stone, one one that stands about ten feet out of the ground, is a very costly matter, and the monuments of the first class in size in the Khaz country are not very numerous; in the monuments of small stones, the number of stones is often great, I have noticed twenty-one stones in a row, no stone exceeding ten feet high.

The upright slabs are (particularly when accompanied by any horizontal slabs) usually placed in a straight line. But frequently, where the horizontal slab is round, the upright slabs stand in the arc of a circle, and sometimes the upright slabs are placed in a curved line apparently by accident, or because the nature of the steep ground suggested such an arrangement. Two such monuments were on the main road to Lakhista.

Major Godwin-Austen states in his article on the subject that the upright slabs always stand in threes, fives, sevens, etc. This is a mistake; to have the number of stones unequal, with the central slab the tallest, is perhaps the plan adopted in forty-nine monuments out of fifty; but among the vast variety of monuments

in these V's a stone monument on the binary type may now be found in which there are two equal upright slabs in the middle, and the other stones placed symmetrically on each side of them. 211

1. There are three kinds of work employed by the Khasis for stone monuments, viz. — 211

- a. The Cherra method.
- b. The Shilling method.
- c. The granite.

Small stones are employed considerable distances from the place of manufacture before they are set up—large stones are not—hence the material of the monuments is determined everywhere geologically.

a. The Cherra method is tedious and cumbersome work equal along the contour edge of the plateau and producing the ledge which marks its abrupt termination. In the great thickness of these mountains no easy hole in which the rock occurs in large slabs with very few joints, and well adapted for working out large slabs therefore. The mountain is generally very hard, but not as hard but that the Khasis can work it with their own antelope-made iron tools. 211

There is a quarry, now in full work, about half a mile out of the old Cherra mountain, upon the Manipal path, where slabs may be seen in preparation. The slabs made from the Cherra mountains, admitting of being worked, are generally heavy, pretty bulky to a shape and smoothed before being set up. The ancient monuments are, however, often made of very rough slabs.

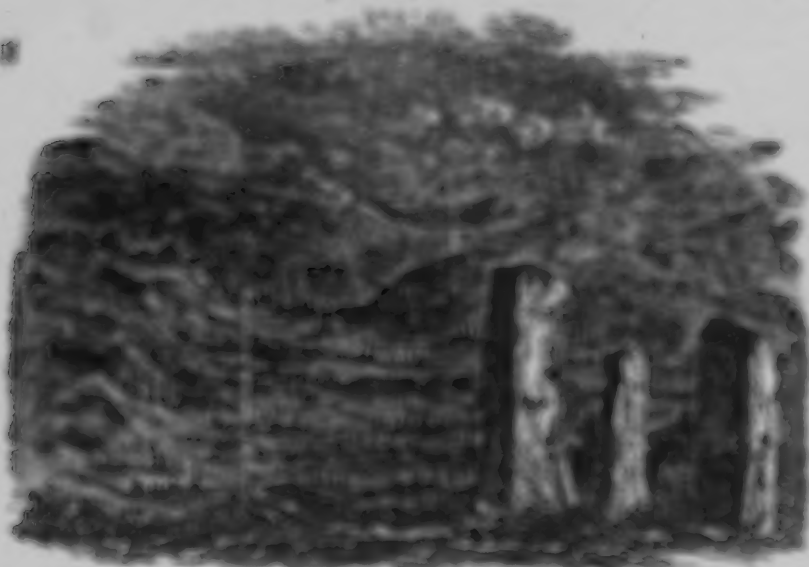
All the well-known monuments near the old Cherra station are made of these mountains, as also the large monuments of Manipal, Mawmai, and Laitum. These three monuments all stand on slabs of Cherra mountains and the stones were cut out of the rock hard by whom they were found. The stones quarried now outside the Cherra mountain, being so transport, are some of great size. 211

The Khasis also work gigantic slabs of stone by hand. When the spot is suitable under country but a single slab four or five feet wide and ten feet thick is thrown across; pieces of enormous blocks of mountains are raised on each side on which the slab may rest, if there is the smallest bar that the water can, is so; find, such the under surface of the slab. As compared with such a bridge the Khasis regard the best efforts of the English engineers as mere childlike. The work of the Khasis is by hand work. 411

b. The Shilling method extends over a large area of the southern portion of the plateau: they are often more symmetrical 216

- 135 (sometimes slaty) than the Chert monuments, and are geologically ancient, probably being of palaeozoic age, but containing no fossils. They are generally inclined at high angles and the beds are full of joints, and do not admit of large slabs being got out of them. I know of no monument of the first class made out of Shilling rocks, but slabs of six feet high are very common. They are generally obtained by splitting out with wooden wedges and are not often finished with iron tools. The monuments on the Shilling sandstone area are therefore of a much rougher character than the Chert monuments, the chert regular in shape, and the stones that should correspond in size only corresponding very roughly. It is often very difficult to say whether these monuments are of the regular 3-5-7 shaped type or not, but they all are designed in general accord with the two great types of upright and horizontal slabs.

- 136 A large area, perhaps 1,000 square miles, of the Shilling plateau, is covered with scattered blocks of granite, varying in size up to masses as large as cottages: perhaps the Shilling rock itself (figured by Micher) might be counted on the extreme size



- 137 such blocks have much. The granite runs east and west through the center (or somewhat through the northern half) of the plateau. It is of great width and continues westward, however broken into isolated areas in the center of the hills, and

in East Jaintia, according to the Khasis, who are good geologists.

These granite blocks are found on the steep hill sides and on the hill tops, the valleys between being often entirely destitute of them. The highest hills of the plains are especially favoured with them as Nongshew (Nongshew) and Laitlambeta. On the edges of the granite area and on the isolated peaks of the country, outlying heaps of granite blocks are found. Around Jorzo (the Jaintia capital), the country is very uniformly at a level of about 4000-4500 feet above the sea, and not a granite block is to be seen there, nor in marching east thence, where you keep at the same level, until you reach the Halliang hill about twelve miles east of Jorzo, where the blocks appear again in full force all over the summit of the hill.

From these granite blocks, slabs of almost any size might be obtained, but the Khasi native iron tools will not work this granite, which is very hard, and the granite slabs used in the Khasi monuments are merely flakes obtained by heaving the block with fire along a line and then pouring cold water upon it. The upright granite slabs thus frequently exhibit one convex and one concave face, as also do the horizontal slabs which are round or oval, not quadrangular. The flakes are entirely unworked in the Khasi territory, so that the granite monuments have an extreme roughness and ruggedness about them which has been commonly supposed to indicate extreme antiquity. This I believe is altogether a mistake, but at the present time the taste of the people appears educated up to a preference for worked stones, and I have not seen any granite monument in process of construction, though I am told that many have been made within the memory of man.

There is an important difference in the Jaintia granite monuments which are neatly worked to the approved form. The Bengali Rajas of the plains, Jaintia and Jaintiapore, have long established an influence in the hills, and Bengali workmen have thus penetrated the hills from Jaintiapore by Jorzo up to Jorzo, the hill capital, and further. The Bengali tools are able to fashion the hard granite, and the gigantic slabs, whether used for monuments or for bridges, are commonly found neatly hewn, all the way from Jaintiapore up to Jorzo, north of Jorzo.

Large granite stones are rather more difficult to move than monuments of the same dimensions, and the first class granite monuments are found on the spot where the granite blocks abound. Where an isolated hill was covered with large blocks, and no blocks were seen anywhere else near, this seems at once to have suggested such a hill as a suitable spot for monumental erection. In just the same way at Stonehenge the large stones

138 were all found within 200 yards of where they now stand, as may be inferred from the story stone at about that distance from Shandunge and not made use of: the small stones were probably brought a considerable distance from the ground area in the north of the country.

144 6. In the setting up of these monuments the Khasis at the
 413 present day use only the simplest and most direct mechanical means. For transporting a big stone wooden rollers are placed beneath it and the stone is then drawn by a large number of men harnessed to it by cotton ropes. To set one of the slabs upright, one end is slipped into a hole dug 1-2 feet in the ground, while the other end is tagged by similar ropes. For pulling one stone upon another, as in a horizontal slab monument, it is drawn up a sloping stage of bamboo, but if the slab be of great weight, a slope of earth must be constructed, up which it may be pulled. These are the present Khasi methods, and it is, of course, highly probable that similar customs were employed in ancient times. I add a more particular account of some of the larger monuments.

20 7. The monument on the Government road end, about six miles north of Cherra, not far from the village of Lihmaw, stands on slabs of Cherra sandstone, out of which the slabs were cut. The tallest stones were about fifteen feet out of the ground. The five stones on the left-hand side (west) of the road were erected when I first visited the hills. The two stones on the right-hand side were erected about four years ago, the family to whom the monument belongs having determined on such an addition. The two portions form one indissoluble monument, and exactly correspond, the stones being accurately worked and finished. The two top-knots are now in among other monuments, but must, I think, be held good evidence of a very late date for their erection. At the Mamnoon monument a large granite is carved in the form of the middle of the big central upright slab, which is also I presume another copy.

11. The monument at Mandaw village. This is, perhaps, the monument in all the hills which exhibits the largest slabs of Cherra sandstone. It stands on slabs of the same rock and there can be little doubt that the slabs were cut on the spot. It is of the (now usual) binary type.

11. The monument at Rindaw in the east of Khasi land. These consist of numerous horizontal and vertical slabs of no great size, the upright slabs being 2-3 feet out of the ground, but favourable for their arrangement on a long open slope within the village. The monuments stand all close together, collected as in a churchyard so that it is not easy to separate

on each monument. The upright slabs are placed mainly in 211
rows, the plane of each slab being parallel to a horizontal line
of the sloping ground. The effect of the whole, at a little dis-
tance, is exactly that of a ruinous English church-yard. The
upright and the flat slabs are exactly correspond to the two types
of tombstones which were in almost universal use in England
before the rise of modern civilization, that the correspondence can
hardly escape notice. It is impossible that this correspondence
can be wholly accidental.

12. The monuments at Lathskoto. These are chiefly made
out of a heap of granite blocks which occupy the level top of a
small hill, and among them are the largest stones in the Klami
country. Some of the upright slabs are as much as 18 feet out
of the ground, and the largest horizontal slab is stated by Colonel
Dobson, in his account, to be an irregular ellipse; major axis, 22
feet; minor axis, 13 feet; thickness, about 2 feet. It is one
block of granite, and, like all the other stones here, is unworked.



These Lathskoto monuments are collected on the level top
of this hill, and (judging, perhaps, from the nature of the ground)
they affect, more or less, a circular arrangement—the upright
slabs being placed irregularly in rows of circles on one side of the
and horizontal slabs. The slabs being of unworked granite are
necessarily oval and not quadrangular; but it should be remarked
that, in travelling from Choue to Lathskoto, the monuments
will be seen to pass quite gradually from the plane to the cir-
cular type.

At Lathskoto, the largest horizontal slab is granite; of the

- 211 others, some are granite, some Shillong sandstone. Of the large upright slabs, round the largest horizontal slab, half are granite, half (placed with-it method) are Shillong sandstone. And so with the other monuments on this hill. There is no general plan or system (so far as I can trace) in the arrangement of these monuments, as a whole.

It has been inferred from the gigantic size, circular arrangement, and rude workmanship of these Lailankote monuments, that they are of extreme antiquity, probably the oldest in the hills. I see no sufficient grounds for such an assumption. The workmanship is no rougher than in other Khasi monuments made of granite and Shillong sandstone: the quasi-circular arrangement may be seen in hundreds of monuments: and as to the size of the stones, that proves to me, chiefly, that the Lailankote monuments were erected when Lailankote was a dominant and prosperous village. I do not say that the Lailankote monuments may not be very old, but I should not be the least surprised if positive proof turned up that they had been erected within the last century.

12. The monuments at Nartiang, figured by Dr. Huxley, and called by him, the "Nartiang Shinghanga." Nartiang is in the Jaintia territory, about ten miles east of the Khasi boundary. Dr. Huxley's picture is on a small scale, and gives little idea of the great extent of the Nartiang monuments, which stand close more closely packed than I should have supposed from the picture.

This Nartiang Shinghanga contains the largest stones of any monuments in the Shillong plateau: they are also remarkable for being of brown granite, and further, they are not scattered about the hill tops, but placed within the moral grave of the village, in a valley near a lake, so that they stand, mingled with large trees, in a manner which I have seen nowhere else in Khasiland.

One of the worked granite blocks is 27 feet high out of the ground, about 4 feet broad at the base, and 2½ feet thick, and is neatly shaped and dressed. This, I suppose to be the work of Bengali workmen, or of their Jaintia apprentices, possibly. There are other very large worked granite slabs; one now used as a bridge, but, perhaps, originally intended for a monument. The area at Nartiang, thickly covered with monuments, is not less than an acre, and there are more scattered monuments around. The existing cause for this Shinghanga is, that at Nartiang there occurs an outlying cluster of granite blocks. Some of the large stones at Nartiang appear to have been moved many feet. The numerous monuments are all reducible to the two types of upright and horizontal slabs, as indicated by the picture of Dr. Huxley.

Until the English period, say up to 1818, it does not appear 211
that the Hindoos penetrated much into the Khasi hills; but 177
they did into the Jaintia hills, and I imagine that either them-
selves or their handicrafts reached as far as Nertitung. There is
a typical large monument of upright stone at Jaintiapore, the
capital of the Jaintia plains.

14. The notes for the above account of the stone monu- 000
ments of the Khasi hills were placed in the hands of Colonel
McCulloch (late Governor-General's agent at Manipoor), and I
have availed myself of many suggestions which he has kindly
given me in the present paper.

DISCUSSION.

Major GEORGE ARTHUR said, one of the most interesting points of
Mr. Clarke's paper is the notice of the separation of the men of the
men and women of a family, at certain intervals, into separate northern
parts. I may mention that the shape of the eyes is never the same
in any one part of the Khasi hills; sometimes they are oblong and
above ground, and sometimes they stand on a raised platform. On
opening one, in a part of the country long since deserted, I found en-
tire bones, polished, and ornaments; these are now always taken
off the body before cremation, but, evidently, in former times, were
buried with the dead. The distance the Khasis sometimes carry the
monumental stones is considerable. I know of blocks of granite that
have been taken into the mountains over twenty four miles. The cus-
tom of setting up these stones is fast dying out, and some villages
have given it up altogether. It is impossible to say what age some
of the monoliths may be; all history of most of them is gone, and
the present generation can give no account of them. The custom is
one of great antiquity, I think, and there is no reason why some of
the stones, now standing, may not be many hundred years old.

Mr. A. L. LOWN said, if he, as a visitor, might be allowed to make
a few remarks, he would suggest that there was no reason whatever
for connecting the monuments of the Khasis with those of Britain.
Mr. Clarke had spoken of stones lying round Stonehenge as showing
that the stones composing it had been gathered close at hand; but
this was not so, as they had been brought from a distance of some
miles, and there were no loose stones lying round Stonehenge, except
those which had been placed there by design. That design was found
existing through all the British circles that he had seen; but it was
certainly not found in the Khasi monuments. It was, however,
found in the circles in southern India, figured by Colonel Forbes
Lea, which differed, therefore, from the Khasi monuments, and re-
sembled those of Britain. He had pointed this out before the British
Association as long ago as 1869, in a paper which could be found
printed in full in the *Journal of Anthropology*, 1870, p. 216, and also
in subsequent papers read before the Anthropological Society and in-
serted, and published in the proceedings.